

# The Daily News

## Governor emphasizes need to fill trades jobs in visit to Kingsford

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KINGSFORD — Shattering stereotypes about career choices is among the goals of Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder's education plan, which tries to better match student training with demands of the workplace.

But even if educators and employers are on board, another factor can stand in the way of good-paying careers in the professional trades, Snyder said during a visit to Lake Shore Systems Inc. in Kingsford.

"Quite often, the parents' perception is the problem," the Republican governor said as he hosted a roundtable for local manufacturing companies and Upper Peninsula school districts. Jobs that don't require a bachelor's degree too often are left out of career discussions, he said.

Since 2011, Michigan has ranked first in the nation for creating new manufacturing jobs, but with that growth comes the problem of finding enough skilled people to fill vacancies, Snyder said.

Across the state, and even the nation, employers say they're struggling to fill openings in the professional trades — careers that may require less schooling and debt than a four-year degree. Electricians, assemblers, machinists, plumbers, millwrights, welders and mechanics are just a few examples.

Wednesday's roundtable, which included representatives of the Michigan Career Pathway Alliance, was intended to promote talks about developing, attracting and retaining workplace talent.

The alliance is a coalition of educators, employers, union leaders, professional organizations, higher-education institutions and economic developers. Its goal is to expand technical programs to help students graduate with in-demand skills.

"The thing that's going to stop us from growing is the ability to bring in people," said Brad Lebouef, executive vice president at Systems Control in Iron Mountain.

Lebouef said he hopes the newly reorganized Dickinson County Economic Development Alliance will bring employers together for educational partnerships that benefit the entire region.

Laura Coleman, president of Bay College in Escanaba-Iron Mountain, said it's encouraging that a computer-aided design and drafting program is now going strong after faltering five years ago for lack of student interest. Robotics taught at the high school level is a major reason for the revival, she said.

Snyder, likewise, stressed the importance of linking education to real-world experiences, opportunities and products.

"Figure out an end-point for satisfaction," he said.

Roger Curtis, director of the Michigan Department of Talent and Economic Development, said finding skilled people to teach career-oriented classes is a huge challenge. To that end, the alliance has several recommendations for recruiting and retaining career technical education instructors:

- Adopt a Michigan Department of Education policy change authorizing CTE instructors to teach for up to 10 years without a certificate. Currently, such teachers are required to gain certification within two years.
- Allow professional trades instructors who have retired to come back and teach without a retirement penalty.

— Develop a condensed teaching certificate for those teaching professional trades courses.

The alliance also wants all students to complete a career exploration class before selecting elective classes in high school.

Dan Bruso, executive vice president of operations at Lake Shore, said lifelong learning should be another point of emphasis. Advances in the manufacturing industry “are going faster than we can keep employees trained,” he said.

Company-wide employment at Lake Shore, which designs and manufactures heavy equipment for the defense and mining industries, is expected to grow past 400 by the end of 2018, up from the current 345.

Meeting those needs, and filling gaps created by an aging workforce, will require greater flexibility in education, Bruso said.

“Government does not create private-sector jobs,” said Snyder, adding that workforce needs can’t be met without increased collaboration between educators and employers.

Snyder unveiled the Michigan Career Pathways Alliance near the end of June, listing 17 recommendations that range from enhanced career counseling to forming talent transcripts to allowing more job shadowing.

Some recommendations will require new legislation while others have already been signed into action by Brian Whiston, state superintendent. One of those directives requires schools to submit a plan with a series of milestones for career exposure in elementary, middle, and high school.

Later in the day, Snyder took an off-road vehicle ride along the new Hermansville to Escanaba multi-use trail, developed through a partnership between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and American Transmission Co.

After a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Thomas St. Onge Veterans Museum in Hermansville, Snyder rode the roughly 25-mile ORV route east into Delta County to the Great Lakes Sports and Recreation Club in Escanaba. Development of the trail began in 2007 when the state acquired the inactive railroad corridor from Wisconsin Central.

“In 2013, the American Transmission Co. approached the DNR about the possibility of siting its electric transmission line next to the rail-trail,” said Ron Yesney, DNR Upper Peninsula trails coordinator. “In return, the company offered to fund construction and maintenance of the recreational trail, including three bridge upgrades.”

The Normenco Sportsman’s Club of northern Menominee County and the Sportsmen’s Off-Road Vehicle Association of Delta County are coordinating trail maintenance.